

## **BEN GUNN**

Text by Paul Muldoon

Music by Scott Wheeler

### 1. ALL AT SEA

I was born and bred in Fermanagh

On the shores of Lough Erne

By six I was an orphan

There was nowhere I could turn

I was taken in by my uncle

The poet Cathal Bui

He spoke to me *as Gaeilge*

I learned Irish at his knee

Till I was eleven years of age

From there I went to Sligo

and the Sligo quay

The future had seemed unclouded

Till I shook from stem to stern

Wave upon wave had flown into a rage

And I found myself at sea

I found myself all at sea

I set sail on the Walrus

With Jack Flint at the helm

Hallions all... hellraisers

Disturbing the peace of the realm

When I left Bristol harbor

In 1743

I paid no more heed to Silver's limp

Than any amputee

From Blackbeard to Barbarossa

For tearing men limb from limb

Was meat and drink to me

To give up ripping to give up robbery

Would have left me overwhelmed

Would have left me at a loss

Would have left me all at sea

With the Welshman Pew who lost his sight

When a cannon burst its breech

And whom I'd promised to lead right

To the treasure buried on the beach

When I failed to deliver the chest of gold

I was first tortured by Israel Hands

Then thrown in chains in the hold

Then set down on a foggy spit of sand

Where it seemed I was destined

To end my days with McPhee and Preston

I never took the time to mourn

Those who live on despite a fatal wound

Or think how many a mariner

Must find himself marooned

Till I woke in that miasma  
with Preston and McPhee  
Jack Silver had stabbed my messmates  
During a drunken spree  
Preston was blood-bearded blood-quiffed  
And when McPhee went junglewards  
I was left without company  
Though I stood there on firm shingle  
I slowly became attuned  
To the fact I had been cast adrift  
To the fact I was at sea  
The fact I was all at sea

## 2. GOAT DANCE

One year I spent trying to creep  
Up on the goats while they were asleep  
In the little copse I called Madrid  
It was the spot  
Where they held court  
And had something akin to sport  
A shegoat and her little Captain Kidd  
Were dancing a gavotte  
When the shegoat gave a leap  
With a huppity-huppity-hup  
For she knew the jig was up

One year I spent finecombing a cap  
Of goatskin so the nap  
Would throw off the rain  
As befits an old salt  
The fact that my coat  
Had been worn by a billy goat  
Meant he hadn't died in vain  
As he waltzed  
Into my pitfall trap  
With a huppity-huppity-hup  
When he knew the jig was up

One year I spent counting the vast  
Treasure Flint had amassed

And buried on Spy

Glass Hill

Till that fateful day

The tenth of May

Three goats and I

Were dancing a quadrille

When we heard a ship's cannon blast

With a huppity-huppity-hup

And we knew the jig was up

### 3. GOT AWAY FROM ME

Once I prayed to god

For a taste of salt cod

Or cheddar cheese

A pickled plum

A nip of rum

A biscuit crumb

The bird I hoped to snare

Took to the air

From the palm tree

It got away from me

It got away

It got away from me

From their sandbar

My fellow tars

Had made mournful pleas

I heard them beg

For a powder keg

From Jack the Peg

I was about to make a point

About the artificial joint

And piracy

It got away from me

It got away

It got away from me

When I came back to England  
After years of godlessness  
I tried to disentangle  
Myself from that unholy mess  
I gave up the sea surge  
For the love of Margaret Bundy  
I gave up Captain Teach  
For the school Meg taught on Sundays

When I came back to England  
After years of being rudderless  
I tried to disentangle  
Myself from my sculdudderies  
I gave up compass for compassion  
A twist of tobacco for whist  
I gave up the Navy ration  
For a nave lying at a list  
I gave up Blind Pew for a pew in church  
Salt cod for the psalter  
Even marriage seemed within reach  
Till Meg left me at the altar  
She got away from me  
Get away she said  
You get away from me

She must have seen I'd lost faith  
In coming alongside her staithe  
And mooring in her lee

In lying in her sheltered cove  
Never more to rove  
In search of treasure trove  
The possibility I once divined  
Of Ben Gunn becoming refined  
The possibility of feeling benign  
Towards Silver and his kind  
And grace one day being mine  
Had tugged on my line  
Then suddenly broke free  
It got away from me  
It got away  
It got away from me

That's why I'm heaving to  
That's why I'm going to fetch  
That goatskin parasol  
From my old sea chest

I'll put together a crew  
And set out afresh  
For the coast of Hy-Brasil  
The Islands of the Blest